WAR BIRDS SAFE WHEN GAS COMES

Mask Not Applied Directly But Does Trick for A.E.F. Carrier Pigeons

STOCK OF HIGHEST GRADE

Feathered Couriers Stick to Old Domestic Life Even When Within Range of Boche Rifles

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Last night was a pretty active one on the front, the pigeon man said. The Boche did not bombard heavily—but enough. He used lots of gas shells.

"We had to put gas masks on the pigeons," said he.

That stretched our credulity. We were in one of the pigeon lofts on the American front. The pretty creatures were walking assertively about our feet and flying over our heads and taking grains of corn from our hands and fighting between times. A carrier pigeon's disposition is not dovelike. In half a dozen places in the loft pairs of gladiators had seized each other by the bills and were tugging and twisting angrily.

A mother bird had laid an egg in a stone bowl at our elbows on a shelf. She seemed suspicious of us. The moment we entered the loft she inspected it. Then she counted it at five minute intervals. "How," we asked offensively, "are you going to put a gas mask on a pigeon?"

But it appeared that the mask was not applied directly to the pigeon. The cage in which he is kept in the front line trench is covered with a bag which has been impregnated by the anti-gas chemicals. A pigeon could resist gas for six hours, the pigeon man said. They were like men. Some of them keeled over in two or three minutes and some could last indefinitely. They suffered from shell shock, too, and from all the other ills that afflict the two-legged creatures who surround them.

Can't Even Trust Pigeon in War

It brought to mind the last time I had seen a pigeon man on the front. He was in the French trenches before Rheims, which that day was being subjected to a fairly heavy bombardment. I had noticed him standing at the mouth of a deep dugout, and because his aspect was so utterly pacific and at variance with his surroundings, I had asked a question. He and his mate, it appeared, were in charge of the carrier pigeons on that sector of the front.

"Come up," he had called to his mate.

By and by the top of the mate's head appeared ascending the perpendicular ladder which led down into the pigeon cote. It was perhaps 20 feet deep and, therefore, fairly safe. In his hand he bore a cage containing a pair of pigeons. He explained that mates were always taken to the trenches together and released together. If the pairs were split, the one that had been taken away from home worried and was unhappy, but the one that remained at home was very apt to take up with another mate.

"In times of war," their master explained, mournfully, "one cannot even trust a pigeon."

All the belligerent armies have made use of carrier pigeons, and the pigeon flyers of the United States have kept abreast of the developments. When we entered the war, then, it was an easy matter for them to plan for a complete pigeon service for our Army. The officers who are in charge of it are among the originators of the homing pigeon society of the United States, which has members in every important city of the Union. The citizen who is outside of pigeon circles has no idea of the number of people interested in pigeon flying. There are 150 pigeon keepers in Cleveland and 200 or more in Cincinnati, and relatively as many in most of the larger towns.

American Lofts Ransacked

When the war broke out the pigeon lofts of the United States were ransacked for good breeding stock. As much as $250 and $300 a pair was paid for pedigreed and tested birds, which have been brought to France to produce young flying stock here. It is a tiny example, but not an unimportant one, of the thorough-going manner in which the United States is preparing for war, and of the vision that at least some of its leaders had as to the probable duration of the conflict. To raise carrier pigeons in France from imported American stock suggests the war may last two years, at the very least.

About 2,000 pigeons in all have been brought to France. Most are young stock, which will become dependable fliers after they have become thoroughly used to their new surroundings. They are distributed at various points on the front in lofts, under the charge of pigeon enthusiasts. About three months are required to make the young birds feel at home in their new surroundings. An old bird can never be successfully transplanted. As long as he lives, he may at intervals try to fly back to his first home.

"Of course, if the man at his old home were to treat the pigeon mean," said the pigeon expert, "and not feed him or pay any attention to him—and maybe ruffle his feathers the wrong way, he would be discontented. Then he could be sent back to his new home to try it over. After the process is repeated two or three times, he might give it up—but you can never be sure. As long as he lives, he might try to get back to his first home."

Birds Must Be Acclimated

For the present, thoroughly acclimated French birds are being used to take messages from the American trenches, but in time the young American stock will become acclimated. The caged birds are sent to the trenches in a traveling motor loft and spend ten days at a time in the dugouts. More than ten days in close confinement is apt to make the birds unhealthy.

"They're smart," said the expert. "When a bird is first released he usually circles two or three times before getting his line for home. Well, the Germans are always on the watch for pigeons and use shotguns on them. After a pigeon has once been shot at, he never circles again. He is off like a shot and does not try for direction until he is safely high in air."

When a bird's tour of trench duty is over, he is made to fly home instead of riding back in his limousine. That accustoms him to the country. More young pigeons are being bought all the time, as they can easily be accustomed to their new surroundings, and by the end of the year they will be completely assimilated by the American Army.

TO THE GUY WHO LANDED HER

(A PIECE OF VERY FREE VERSE)

Yes, she wrote me the other day
All about it;
Said she saw a lot in you that she never saw before,
Said I'd done you an injustice in the things I said about you,
Added that I had been careless in writing to her,
(Which is the postal department's fault, and not mine),
And said she didn't think I cared for her any more.
Result: She's engaged to you!

Well, congratulations!
There never was a finer girl in all the world,
And, probably, there never will be!
In short, you are a whole lot luckier than,
In all due respect, you deserve to be.

I could have married her last April
Before the selective service law went into effect,
And then the War Department could have whistled for me
And been out of luck for its whistling.
But I wasn't going to get tied up with any woman,
No matter how fine she was, with a war like this one a-going.
So I enlisted, and she thought it great.
She called me hero, brave boy, all the rest.
Knit sweaters for me, and make wristlets for me,
And came down to see me in camp.
I thought, of course, that it was all fine stuff,
That I'd come back at least a sergeant-major
With a *Croix de Guerre*, a medal of honor and all that,
And a big *pickelhaube* helmet to put up on the mantelpiece
To use as the baby's bank.

But no such luck. I wrote her, just like clockwork,
Stinted myself on beer to buy her handkerchiefs,
Kept lights after taps to look at her picture,
And, any way you've a mind to take it, played it square.
I didn't learn French, for the simple reason
That I didn't want to get in with any French dames
And so be tempted to forget her.
But that's all the good it did me—you're It now,
And all my joining up has gone for nothing.

Oh, I don't care; I've got a job before me—
It doesn't bring in as much money as yours does,
But it's a damn sight more interesting:
And I don't have to take out insurance for anyone
Unless I want to.
I guess when I get back things will be different
And I'll make up, in job-getting, what you have gained
By not going to war at all.

No, I'm not sore or sour-grapes, or anything.
But I just want to let you know I'm on to you—
I know you're 32, and past the draft age;
I know that, even if they boosted the draft age,
You'd plead an aged mother to support
(Whom you haven't given a cent to in the last five years).

Oh, you're within the law, all right: no one can blame you.
With such a prize before you, for popping the question
And getting her to agree to marry you.
In fact, to take it from a world point of view,
She'd be a fool if she didn't.

BUT—
When we get back, all full of prunes and glory,
I don't want to see you, cheering, on the sidewalk,
I don't want to receive your congratulations,
Nor to be invited to your house for dinner
To meet Her and the kids—oh, no!
Because I've got my opinion of a guy
That'll let another guy go out and defend his home for him
(And run the chance of dying for defending him)
And just about as much as threaten a girl into marrying him—
And don't you forget it!

MOST OF ALPHABET IN MILITARY LABELS

S.O.S. Is Latest Tag to Make Place For Itself on Army Records

S.O.S.

Here's the very latest in initials.

We've had quite a bunch of capital letters in groups with periods between 'em to puzzle over and learn since we joined the Army—V.O.C.O., U.S.R., N.A., R.T.O., and many more, not to speak of the three magic letters A.E.F., which are destined to go down through the ages along with "U.S.A."

S.O.S., be it known, is short for "Service of Supplies," which will be the general title from now on for the "two men in five" who will have to remain behind to keep the boys on the line in gunpowder, bully beef, "the makins," etc. It will include the Transportation Department, the Quartermaster Corps, the Railroad Transportation Officers, and others.

But S.O.S. won't necessarily mean very far in the rear, however. The railroad engineers, for instance, are of the S.O.S., and they have already been in the big mix-up.

Initials frequently are misleading, as one captain of the Quartermaster Corps with testify. He handed an English officer his card the other day, on which was appended, after his name, "Q.M.C., N.A., R.T.O."

The British officer didn't understand and the American undertook to explain.

"Q.M.C. is the Quartermaster's Corps," he said, "and N.A. is for National Army."

"Ah, I see," said the British officer, "and the R.T.O. stands for Railways, Tramways, Omnibuses," I suppose.

Here are a few of the more common initials. Cut the list out and save it, if you don't know them already:

V.O.C.O.—Verbal Order Commanding Officer.
R.O.—Regimental Order.
S.O.—Special Order.
U.S.R.—United States Reserve.
E.O.R.C.—Engineer Officers' Reserve Corps.
M.O.R.C.—Medical Officers' Reserve Corps.
D.O.R.C.—Dental Officers' Reserve Corps.
N.A.—National Army.
U.S.A.—United States Army (Regular)
R.T.O.—Railway Transportation Officer.
Q.M.R.C.—Quartermaster's Reserve Corps.
U.S.M.C.—United States Marine Corps.
M.G.Bn.—Machine Gun Battalion.
A.S.—Air Service.
L. of C.—Lines of Communication.
D.G.T.—Director General of Transportation.
I.S.G.S.—Intelligence Section, General Staff.
G.H.Q.A.E.F.—General Headquarters, American Expeditionary Forces.

MOST APPROPRIATE

"What's the meaning of those new collar ornaments they've got for the chemical corps—they look like a couple of crossed meerschaums?"

"Sure, that's what they are? Hasn't the chemical corps got a pipe?"

One thing that one soon learns in this man's army is that the girl who could dance like a blue streak can't knit socks for a cent.

LITTLE STORIES FROM UP FRONT

MUCH ODOR—NO GAS

Sitting in an advanced listening post that extended out into No Man's Land, one night, I thought I detected gas. A corporal and two privates were with me in the sheltered, box-like post, from which they were keeping a sharp lookout on the German trenches across the way.

"Then get into the gas masks quick," ordered the corporal. "Can't take any chances on that stuff."

At the same time he sounded the gas alarm and pretty soon we could see them sending up rockets farther back, which were a signal to the reserve troops also to prepare for a possible gas attack.

After about ten minutes, the trench gas officer came out to investigate.

"I don't detect any gas at all, corporal," he said. "You must have been mistaken," and he went back and sent out a "danger past" signal.

The corporal then made himself comfortable on an old box alongside of me and began telling me about his girl back in New Jersey.

All the time, however, I was getting whiffs of something that almost knocked me off the box.

"Corporal," I said, at length, "I don't want to be the cause of any more fake gas scares, but I certainly do smell something awful."

The corporal himself sniffed a few times and then declared he couldn't smell a thing.

"Come over here and see if you can smell anything," he said to the two privates who were standing nearby. "This newspaper guy here thinks he's being gassed again."

After the privates had inhaled the night air a few times in our immediate vicinity one of them said to the corporal:

"Say, Bill, he doesn't smell gas; it's that stink bag you've got around your neck that he's been smelling all the time."

Thereupon, Bill the corporal unbuttoned his coats and fished out from behind his underwear a little bag that was fastened to a string around his neck.

The odor was something t-e-r-r-i-b-l-e!

"Well, I'll be darned," was Bill's comment. "Don't you know what that's for? No? Well, we wear these bags that are filled with some chemical or medicine or something and they keep the trench vermin off us. Say, they're fine. They actually drive the crawlers right out through your shoes. I can get you one if you want me to."

KEEPING DOWN EXPENSES

Recently the first detachment of negroes reached the American sector northwest of Toul. They were put to work behind the lines, principally at cutting wood and repairing roads. They were well out of harm's way, unless some Boche aeroplane should drop bombs near them, but they could hear the gunfire plainly and see at night the flashes of cannon or rockets. They could talk, too, with soldiers just from the trenches. All this made a deep impression.

"I done took out ten thousand dollars of dis yeer guv'ment life insurance," announced one negro to another as they started to work one day.

"What y'all want with all that money?" asked the second.

"Well," said the first, "gettin' pretty riskysome 'round yere. Ten thousand dollars be pretty good t'have if one them shells should knock a leg offen me."

"Knock leg offen you?" repeated the second. "Why say, you don't think you'se ever gwine to de trenches, do ye? Don't talk foolish. Uncle Sam ain't gwine risk no ten thousand dollar nigger in de trenches. He got plenty cheap white soldiers for dat kind of business."

A BOCHE WHO GOT SECONDS

"How is the orderly coming along bathing the German prisoner?" asked the captain at a certain field hospital of the sergeant.

"He started washing his right hand at six o'clock, sir. It's now seven, and he's only half way round," came the reply.

The captain laughed. It's the talk of the hospital that the young Boche, who was captured out of a shell hole when the Germans were beaten back on an attempted raid, has the largest hand seen around these parts in the memory of the oldest American inhabitants.

The young Boche, too, is what the sergeant calls "slick." He was badly frightened on first arriving at the hospital, especially when taken to the operating room. When his breakfast was brought to him he refused to eat at first. He was finally persuaded to drink his coffee, and having done that and found that he still lived, he finished the breakfast.

Later, another orderly came along and asked if he had had his breakfast. The prisoner answered, "No," and ate the second one when it arrived.

A RECORD BREAKING CANTEEN

An American traveling canteen, operated nightly, claims the record of approaching nearer the front lines and selling to soldiers than any of any other army.

Leaving a certain base almost out of range of enemy guns, a big motor truck lumbers forward after dark, stopping at billets, cantonments and other places where troops are congregated. It dispenses hot coffee, canned goods, tobacco, cigars, cigarettes, candy, writing paper and articles of clothing. Sometimes it is under fire throughout its entire schedule.

The motor truck, on its nightly trips, has never been hit, but several times shells have whistled uncomfortably close.

"We intend to keep going until we are knocked out. Then we will try to get another truck," says the conductor.